

parse the future can look back on a long line of ancestors who saw ahead through a glass darkly—from George Washington who took over the army promising to be home by Christmas to the economists who promised us a cheap-energy seventies. While, as in horse racing, there are arguments for betting on a surprise-free future, tomorrow like yesterday, if this were to be the case, we would all still be in the Garden of Eden. Yet Jenkins's future after the proposed nuclear detonation is, as much as possible, nearly as free of surprises as one might hope. (Whether the terrorists will go nuclear and how was—seemingly—less his brief and less interesting at this stage). He indicates that there would be many variables, but all are familiar—security at nuclear facilities or moves against dissidents or problems of proliferation. The possibilities that flow from such potentials are not only equally familiar but equally various.

Will the fact of nuclear terrorism accelerate nuclear proliferation or slow it down? The answer to this question would depend in part on the circumstances of the first act of nuclear terrorism and on the subsequent response taken by the world; but whatever the circumstances, one can see some nations deciding to go nuclear, others deciding against it.

Jenkins on proliferation—and on the other variables—is saying that various circumstances will result in various responses, that he does not know the circumstances—no one does—nor the responses except that they might be this or that or again they might not. After our being repeatedly told *exactly* what might happen in case of a nuclear terrorist incident and thus *exactly* what one must do to prevent such a horror, Jenkins's uncertainty is refreshing—and more to the point, accurate. Learned and in-

formed speculation about the future is, if nothing more, academic fun and games, at best provocative. Such doomsday speculation on events a decade in the future is hardly weighty evidence to bring to bear on contemporary matters. Jenkins wisely does not do so. His analysis really has no conclusions, only possibility—maybe there will be cults or crusades, maybe there will not.

What comes through at the end is that if the worst occurs, the impact on society, certainly Western society of the next decade, will be within known parameters, will be to a large degree free of surprises. While there is no common wisdom on cults or crusades or proliferation, there is no indication that Jenkins feels Armageddon looms or the West will end with the Bang. Such a potential Bang has been with us for over a generation. In April 1945, Henry Stimson sent a memorandum to President Truman worrying about "such a weapon constructed in secret." So far there has been no such secretly constructed weapon or, in fact, the use of any secret nuclear device as a weapon. Perhaps there will not be in the next generation either—a comfortable surprise-free future. But if, as Jenkins has been asked to postulate, there is a nonstate Bang, large or small, his evidence and analysis seem to indicate, rather convincingly, that the impact will be visible in conventional ways. And, given all, the various responses may be equally conventional. This, as in so many nuclear matters, may be cold comfort; but under a real mushroom cloud rising from a terrorist's detonated nuclear device, any comfort is welcome. □

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## Controversies: Nuclear Terrorism

# Inquiry and Morality

Richard A. Falk

**H**ave Mr. Jenkins and his employer, the RAND Corporation, engaged in an inquiry into nuclear terrorism that is, to quote Pablo Neruda, "Like a barking where there are no dogs"? In the background of this question are, of course, the mock heroics of an earlier generation of RAND analysts, Herman Kahn and cohorts, who garlanded their gruesome inquiries into the effects of nuclear war with such self-congratulatory phrases as

"thinking about the unthinkable." Why, we must ask, did Kahn's inquiries arouse such hostile reactions, and is Jenkins's inquiry of a similar character?

The anti-Kahn camp had two main objections to the RAND approach. First, the exercise of inquiry appeared to have some unmeasurable, yet real, impact on the plausibility and legitimacy of nuclear warfare—keeping the topic unthinkable, at least by those in the indirect

employ of the defense establishment, seemed to reinforce inhibitions on use. Secondly, there was more than the suspicion, abetted by Kahn's style of combining claims of objectivity with bursts of bravado, that his inquiry amounted to a subtle tract in favor of a much more aggressive posturing in geopolitics by the United States. His message, in essence: nuclear war, even if it comes in its worst forms, will not be any worse than other civilizational traumas that societies experience and recover from;

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therefore, let us, as a country enjoying nuclear paramountcy and conventional inferiority, be bolder. Nuclear-induced timidity is unjustified, he argued; it plays into the hands of our adversary in the Kremlin, and may even generate an aggression-appeasement cycle that will eventuate in global conflagration.

Jenkins, in addressing nuclear terrorism, cannot be fairly accused of any comparable motivation or effect; yet the intellectual lineage is present and, given the subject matter, seems appropriate for consideration. Here, again, we have an elaborate claim, more convincing than in Kahn's case, to assess a highly charged subject matter in a dispassionate spirit without preconceptions or hidden agendas. Yet I feel discomfort in the presence of this inquiry. Given the auspices and cultural context, its coolness of tone seems well suited to helping those in or close to authority in the United States consider what might be done to avoid or prepare for nuclear terrorism. Here, the societal danger, if one exists, lies in helping create the antidemocratic mind-set appropriate to deal with such a horrific threat to civic order. There is no evidence in Jenkins's essay that he personally favors such preparations at this stage; but dealing with nuclear terrorism as a plausibility inevitably sets up in the minds of those who read such inquiries a concern about what to do, especially if their principal vocation relates to the maintenance of order, coercively if necessary.

My concern here is itself in some sense suspect, since it suggests that the "freedom" of the analyst be conditioned by a realization that inquiry under certain auspices is socially dangerous, the more so, if, as here, it presents itself as dispassionate in tone and intention. Raising such an issue inevitably raises the question of plausibility, of whether there is a substantial risk that dogs exist, as well as their barking. Here, Mr. Jenkins is careful. He does not, as do so many other recent merchandisers of terrorist hysteria, attempt to arouse anxieties unduly by overstating the prospect of nuclear terrorism. His discussion is balanced, and he makes the important suggestion, critical in the wider context of nuclear policy, that "we might be

exaggerating the rationality . . . of states just as we exaggerate the irrationality of terrorists."

Nevertheless, Jenkins plunges on into the subject matter of nuclear terrorism, maintaining at all stages a perfectly expressionless and bland exterior, choosing a form of discourse calculated to induce trust and respect among elite audiences, a form equally likely to generate discomfort among counter-elite or more libertarian-minded readers. There is, in Jenkins's analysis, no indication that the prospect of *any* nuclear threat or use fills him with moral revulsion. It is this pervasive tone of amorality, this thoroughly technicist stance, that is likely to make us as a polity capable of doing anything, and as such is a civilizational, and hence, a world historical menace. True, with respect to terrorism *qua* terrorism there is some implicit sense of moral revulsion; but so long as this revulsion is cut off from the wider claims to advance interests by threats and possible uses of nuclear weaponry (and, perhaps, by any reliance on firepower tactics of deliberate destruction that ignore the immunities of the innocent), it seems politically self-serving and morally unconvincing. Why should the conception and rhetoric of "nuclear terrorism" be confined to those who act *against* the state? Is not any posture of nuclear reliance deeply implicated in a terrorist ethos? One recalls Michael Walzer's comment that "nuclear weapons explode the theory of just war." No calculus of justification holds anywhere along the nuclear spectrum (including civilian nuclear power), and therefore it becomes arbitrary and suspect to focus anxiety upon this particular category of behavior. The same reasoning pertains to comparable efforts to isolate the issue of nonproliferation from the overall agenda of denuclearization.

Jenkins as dutiful social scientist approaches the hierarchical character of world order in the same cool spirit of innocent, dispassionate inquiry. He notes, correctly, that a nuclear terrorist "incident that occurs in Asia, Africa, or Latin America is likely to be less shocking (at least to the North Atlantic population) than one that occurs in Western Europe or North America." And further, "we . . .

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have a greater expectance of political violence in the Third World. A nuclear explosion in Pakistan or elsewhere in the Middle East would conform to the perception of these nations as wild countries, would set tongues clicking, but would not have the impact of a similar detonation in Paris or London." Jenkins writes of "*the* perception" rather than "*our* perception," objectifying still further a vantage point that is cut off from its constraining bias. There is in

Jenkins's reflections a sense of looking out from the North upon the South. As a matter of sociology of knowledge, it is worth noticing that the preoccupation with terrorism is so geographically concentrated in the Trilateral countries of the North.

Although Jenkins makes the indispensable point that "terrorists emulate states," he fails to extend this observation to the political and moral terrain. It is for him only a matter of mimetic technics and tactics. Surely, it is within the statist domain that the terrorist ethos is being legitimated vis-à-vis nuclear weapons strategy and potential use. The most bloodthirsty of terrorists are, at most, only pale derivatives of the civil leaders of the great states. Terrorists often seem impelled by the desperate sense of being faced with overwhelming odds despite the justice of their cause, whereas governmental leaders normally purport no more than the pursuit of vital interests. The ter-

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rorist situation, so to speak, is one in which the characteristic leaders of the state would feel (and have felt) quite justified in unleashing whatever instruments of terror are at their disposal at a given moment of historical and technological time.

It is always easier to criticize than to do better. In responding to Jenkins I have been wondering all along how I might (if I should) respond to such an assignment, acknowledging *en passant* that in fundamental societal function Princeton is not so different from RAND and that, therefore, I can claim no moral advantage merely because of having apparently more neutral auspices. The Ivy League has been down on moral passion these days, and quite up on rendering prudent counsel to the state in the most conceivably anodyne prose. To challenge this stance of stylistic composure is itself to marginalize oneself in relation to the "academic professionalism" of America, involving a lapse of decorum far more objectionable than substantive dissent.

Nevertheless, I would argue that any anticipation of nuclear terrorism must be interpreted morally and politically, if at all, then in relation to the wider, shaping realities of nuclear permissiveness (weaponry, doctrine, civilian power) and terrorism (official policies of terror for internal order and foreign policy). Our politics are permeated by nuclear terrorism to such a degree that we incline any "player" in the competitive arena of struggle

to use comparable means. To withdraw this sanction through a mobilization of moral passion at the popular level is the only way to inhibit the inclination to enlarge the scale of terrorism, even unto and across the nuclear threshold. To say anything more concrete about effects is, as a matter of serious, nonfictional inquiry, "a bad trip."

By this I mean there is nothing nontrivial that can be said. Worse, there are issues of decorum that go to the essence of civic virtue. Some inquiries are "unthinkable" for good reason; the Greeks embodied such wisdom in their mythic image of Pandora's Box. To spin out general lines of consequence in the event of nuclear terrorism, as does Jenkins, is to extend rationality beyond its useful limit without enlivening the imagination. Perhaps a gifted writer could allow us to experience in some genuine sense aspects of a *particular* instance of nuclear terrorism by positing a specific context, but to speculate on nuclear terrorism in general leads nowhere except possibly to contingency plans. When Jenkins writes at the end of his essay about "signature" (determining the author of the attack), he makes a disclaimer that is itself a signature—"the author has no knowledge of the technical problems or the state of the art in this area." Linguistic pomp and circumstance substitute for data, experience, and any solid footing on which to base useful or interesting analysis.

I realize that I have written an ungenerous comment. Mr. Jenkins has done his job about as well as it could be done, and I am attacking him for undertaking to do it at all. Oddly, I think, such an attack is, at once, unfair *and* right. Suppose some security-minded group posed for think-tank analysts the problem of how to respond in the event that some crazed group kidnapped the president's daughter and threatened to torture her as a national spectacle. It is possible, it is "unthinkable," and it seems clearly best left alone. To consider such contingencies is to make them already happen, at least symbolically, and is morally numbing as a result. It is important to realize that inhibitions on inquiry serve a social and moral function, and are not merely non-macho expressions of squeamishness. Where does this leave us? At a cultural divide where some of us say "stop here," while others trudge off into the nuclear wilderness. In all probability, there is no current hope for communication across the divide. At best, our intellectual cartographers can take note.□

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